

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 ACDA-07 IO-13 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /076 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4083

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 4330

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: DRP WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN JUNE 10 BY-ELECTION

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: SEOUL 3402 (260801Z APR 77)

SUMMARY: ON MAY 23, DRP SPOKESMAN ANNOUNCED HIS PARTY WILL NOT RUN CANDIDATE IN UPCOMING JUNE 10 BY-ELECTION FOR TWO VACANT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEATS. NDP HAD PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED IT WOULD ALSO BOYCOTT RACE DESPITE SOME OPPOSITION TO THIS WITH-IN PARTY. FEARING THEY HAVE MORE TO LOSE THAN WIN, NEITHER GOVERNMENT NOR OPPOSITION PARTY SEEMS WILLING TO TEST ITS STRENGTH WITH VOTERS IN CHONGNO AND CHUNG DISTRICTS WHICH HAVE TRADITIONALLY SUPPORTED ANTI-GOVERNMENT PARTIES. END SUMMARY

1. ON EVENING OF MAY 23, DRP SPOKESMAN PAK CHOL ISSUED SURPRISE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT DRP WOULD NOT RUN CANDIDATE IN JUNE 10 BY-ELECTION. PAK'S ANNOUNCEMENT
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CLOSELY FOLLOWED ROKG DECLARATION EARLIER IN DAY THAT BY-ELECTION FOR TWO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEATS IN COMBINED CHONGNO AND CHUNG DISTRICTS WOULD BE HELD ON JUNE 10, IN ADVANCE OF ANY SPECIAL ASSEMBLY SESSION. BOTH SEATS HAVE BEEN VACANT SINCE DRP ASSEMBLYMAN AND PUBLISHER CHANG KI-YONG'S DEATH AND REMOVAL OF CHONG IL-HYONG FROM HIS SEAT IN WAKE OF MYONGDONG TRIAL.

2. IN PAST FEW WEEKS, NEITHER DRP NOR NDP HAS DEMONSTRATED ANY ENTHUSIASM, IN PRIVATE AT LEAST, FOR TESTING ITS PARTY'S STRENGTH IN THIS BY-ELECTION. BOTH RECOGNIZED POTENTIAL IMPORTANCE OF THIS ELECTION AS A HARBINGER OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AND ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OF 1978 AND 79, YET NEITHER FELT CONFIDENT IT COULD WIN DECISIVELY AT THIS POINT.

3. PUBLIC REASON FOR DRP WITHDRAWAL FROM RACE WAS TO "AVOID AN OVERHEATED ELECTION CLIMATE WHICH MIGHT IMPAIR NATIONAL CONSENSUS." LOCAL OBSERVERS SUGGEST THAT THIS IS TRUE IN PART, BUT ROKG MAY ALSO FEAR (1) PUBLIC DEBATE OF U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL; (2) PUBLIC REFERENDUM ON PRESIDENT PAK'S EMERGENCY MEASURES WHICH A CLEVER OPPOSITION CANDIDATE COULD PROMOTE; AND (3) HUMILIATION OF LOSING RACE TO AN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE. IN EFFECT, ROKG APPEARS TO HAVE COME TO CONCLUSION IT COULD NOT SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCE OR CONTROL RESULTS OF ELECTION. UNDERLYING DECISION MAY ALSO REFLECT ROKG'S GENERAL DISTASTE FOR THE ELECTION PROCESS AND GRADUAL EFFORT TO DOWNGRADE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

4. EVEN BEFORE DRP ANNOUNCEMENT, NDP HAD BEEN SAYING BOTH IN PUBLIC AND IN PRIVATE THAT IT ALSO MIGHT NOT FIELD ANY CANDIDATE THIS TIME OUT. PARTY SPOKESMAN GAVE AS ONE EXCUSE THAT IT COULD NOT RUN IN AN ELECTION GOVERNED BY EMERGENCY MEASURE NO. NINE AND THE PRESENT ELECTION LAWS. FOLLOWING DRP ANNOUNCEMENT, NDP POLITICAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL MET (MAY 24) AND AFTER SOME SQUABBLING, DECIDED TO MAKE THEIR BOYCOTT OF ELECTION FORMAL. NDP HAS BEEN TRADITIONAL VICTOR IN PAST CONFIDENTIAL

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ELECTIONS IN THIS DISTRICT BUT THIS PARTICULAR ELECTION HAS HAD THEM WORRIED. NEITHER PARTY HAS BEEN SURE HOW RECENT ROKG "REDISTRICTING" IN CHUNGNO-CHUNG WOULD AFFECT ELECTION. NDP IS STILL SUFFERING FROM INTRA-PARTY DISSENSION AND TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES EXPECTS TO HAVE LOST ITS PRIME CANDIDATE, KIM OK-SUN, ONCE SUPREME COURT ISSUES DECISION ON HER LONG-STANDING ELECTION LAW VIOLATION CASE. NDP ASSEMBLYMEN HAVE TOLD EMBOFFS PRIVATELY THAT PARTY DOES NOT HAVE VIABLE CANDIDATE. EVEN IF SHE WERE TO ENTER RACE, MRS. KIM TAE-CHUNG WOULD RUN AS INDEPENDENT, NOT FOR NDP. CHONG TAE-CHAL, SON OF CHONG IL-HYONG, IS NOT A POLITICIAN AND THUS FAR HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO TAKE ON SUCH A ROLE, EVEN IN HIS FATHER'S OLD DISTRICT.

5. ON MAY 25, ALL EVENING PAPERS FEATURED EDITORIALS CRITICAL OF DRP, NDP AND DUP WITHDRAWALS FROM ELECTION. (DUP HAD OPTED OUT MUCH EARLIER.) TENOR OF CRITICISM HAS BEEN THAT PUBLIC JUSTIFICATIONS GIVEN BY PARTIES DO NOT HOLD WATER. ESPECIALLY CRITICAL WAS TONGA ILBO EDITORIAL

WHICH SAID THAT WHATEVER HIS LEVEL OF SOPHISTICALTION, NO ONE CAN ACCEPT EXCUSE THAT U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL WOULD AFFECT SUCH AN ELECTION. "WE HAD PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN PUSAN DURING KOREAN WAR," IT EMPHASIZED. "ELECTIONS PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY, THEY DON'T HARM IT."

6. COMMENT: WHATEVER PRECISE RATIONALES FOR PARTY WITHDRAWAL MAY BE - AND THE IMMEDIATE SUSPICION WILL BE A DEAL WAS MADE WITH THE OPPOSITION -- IT IS CLEAR THAT PARTY LEADERS HAVE CONCLUDED THEY HAVE MORE TO LOSE FROM ENTERING DEMOCRATIC ELECTION PROCESS THAN TO WIN. BY OPTING OUT AS THEY HAVE HOWEVER, NOT ONLY PARTIES BUT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ALL KOREANS DESIRING EFFECTIVE POLITICAL DEMOCRACY END UP AS LOSERS.
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